

# Prayer Works Workshop: Forgive us our Trespasses

(from *The Small Catechism*, Dr. Martin Luther., part three, p.10)

“We ask in this prayer that our Father in heaven would not hold our sins against us and because of them refuse to hear our prayer. And we pray that He would give us everything by grace, for we sin every day and deserve nothing but punishment. So we on our part will heartily forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.”

In this section, we will explore the portion of the Lord’s Prayer that centers on the phrase “forgive us our debts” from Matthew 6:9-13:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be Your name,  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.

In his book, *A Layman Looks at the Lord’s Prayer*, Phillip Keller recounts a personal story involving a potter in the back streets of Pakistan. Keller had asked the elderly man if he could watch him work his craft on a potter’s wheel. With his consent, Keller followed the Pakistani man into a dank, dark room away from the bustling shops. The potter had begun to spin the potter’s wheel when: Suddenly, as I watched, to my utter astonishment, I saw the stone stop. Why? I looked closely. The potter removed a small particle of grit from the goblet. His fingers had felt its resistance to his touch. He started the stone again. Quickly he smoothed the surface of the goblet. Then just as suddenly the stone stopped again. He removed another hard object - another tiny grain of sand – that left a scar in the side of the clay.

A look of anxiety and concern began to creep over the aged craftsman’s face. His eyes began to hold a questioning look. Would the clay carry within it other particles of sand or grit or gravel that would resist his hands and wreck his work? Would all his finest intentions, highest hopes, and wonderful wishes come to nothing? Why is my Father’s will – His intention to turn out truly beautiful people brought to naught again and again? Because of their resistance, because of their hardness. Why, despite His best efforts and endless patience with human beings, do they end up a disaster? Simply because they resist His will, they will not cooperate, they will not comply with His ommands. His hands – those tender, gentle,gracious hands – are thwarted by our stubborn wills.

(from *The Inspirational Writings of Phillip Keller*, p. 205-206)

Sin in our lives is a lot like grit. Sin in many ways represents resistance in our lives to the work of the master potter. He is shaping and molding our lives on the potter’s wheel. Yet we often cling to attitudes, habits, thoughts, and behaviors that act as “gritty” opposition to the Master’s hands. Jesus is making it very clear; we must confess the grit in our lives. We must come clean before the Lord and ask Him to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. When we do that on a regular basis, 1 John 1:8-9 reminds us that God is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins. Let’s be honest though; it takes courage and humility to come to God with

sin in our lives. It can be much more comfortable to stay in denial. But that is just what the enemy of our souls wants. Satan knows that unconfessed sin, which stays in the darkness, has a way of interfering with God's work in our lives. This part of the Lord's prayer is a reminder that we must be diligent to not let grit remain hidden. Name your sins specifically, as the Holy Spirit brings them to mind and receive the cleansing that your soul, mind, and heart need.

One final thought...forgiveness of personal sin has a direct connection with the command to forgive others. When Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer He made it clear: we are to forgive others just as we ourselves have received forgiveness. Often, this is easier said than done and requires a choice of our wills. Granting forgiveness to others is never easy, especially when someone else has thrown "grit" on to our lives. I often want to say, "would you please keep your grit to yourself, I have enough in my own life without you helping me out...thank you very much!" With this in mind, keep short accounts of wrongs that others have inflicted upon you. Believe it or not, it is in your own best interest to let the debt go, rather than harboring bitterness and resentment. Choosing to forgive will grant freedom and vitality in your life. That is why Jesus connected the two ideas together when He taught on forgiveness of sin.

**APPLICATION ACTIVITY:** Take some time on your own to allow God to remind you of unconfessed sin in your life. Allow the categories below to get you thinking about your thoughts and actions over the past 14 days. In your private time, simply ask God to bring to mind by His Spirit any area of your life that needs to be confessed and forgiven. Take a portion of time with each word and ask, "Father is there any way that I have demonstrated \_\_\_\_\_ in the last 14 days?." If something comes to mind, ask Him to forgive you and then move on to the next word. Feel free to do the whole exercise silently in prayer or if you are more comfortable use the space provided below to write out your prayers. You might want to use a phrase like, "Father, I confess that I have been \_\_\_\_\_ when I \_\_\_\_\_. I ask that you would forgive me and cleanse me.

Anger  
Pride  
Self-sufficiency  
Not trusting God  
Lust  
Envy  
Boasting  
Self-pity

Resentment  
Jealousy  
Hurting another with my words  
Negative attitude  
Gluttony  
Money or possession focused  
Disobeying God  
Lies or half-truths

**HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT:** Take some time this week to ask God to reveal to you the people and the offenses that you have not forgiven. Make a list on paper as the Lord helps you remember. Forgiving others does not mean we simply "forget." Rather, it is a choice. We are choosing to forgive so that we can experience full freedom in Christ. Do not expect this to be easy. But it is well worth the effort!

For each person on your list, say aloud: "Father, I forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for (specifically identify all offenses and painful memories)\_\_\_\_\_."